AMENDMENT UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.111
U.S. Application No. 09/392,585
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AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Abstract of the Disclosure:

According to the process for monitoring the consumptions of a plurality of franking machines through a public communication network, at least one franking machine not being connected to this network, a link is firstly established with a management server, through the public network, by means of at least one supervision terminal independent of the off-line franking machine, in accordance with a determined protocol of communication, and data is then exchanged between the terminal and the server during which the user ~~acquires~~ inputs at the supervision terminal a current invoicing index relative to the off-line franking machine and receives in return a code of authorization to frank in order to validate the subsequent frankings of the off-line franking machine.

Page 2, Second Paragraph:

These objects are attained by a process for monitoring the consumptions of a plurality of franking machines through a public communication network, at least one franking machine not being connected to this network, characterized in that a link with a management server is firstly established through the public network, by means of at least one supervision terminal independent of the at least one offline franking machine, in accordance with a determined protocol of communication, and then data are

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exchanged between the terminal and the server during which the user ~~acquires~~ inputs

at the supervision terminal a current invoicing index relative to the at least one off-line

franking machine and in return receives a code of authorization to frank in order to

validate the subsequent frankings of the at least one off-line franking machine. The

protocol of communication used for establishing a link with the remote server is either a

Videotex protocol, for example the teletel protocol, or a protocol of TCP/IP type.

Page 3, Second Paragraph:

The data exchange step comprises a step of ~~acquisition~~ inputting by the user of

an identifier including at least one password or personal identification number and a

step of display, at the supervision terminal, on the one hand, of a list of the printing

heads associated with said user's plurality of franking machines, and, on the other

hand, for each printing head, of a last invoicing index validated by the server.

Page 4, Second through Fourth Paragraphs Continued to Page 5:

Referring now to the drawings, an example of configuration of a user's set

of franking machines is shown in Figure 1. This set is located for example at two

different production sites. On a first site S1, a single franking machine of electronic type

is available, connected by a modem 12 to a public communication network, for example

the switched telephone network or a numeric network (~~RTC/RI~~VISPSTN/ISDN 40). On a

second site S2, distinct from the first, five franking machines, three of electronic type

and two traditional electromechanical machines, are available.The electronic machines

20, 22, 24 are for example connected to an internal network 26 which presents a

common access to the public network 40 via a modem 28, while the two traditional

machines 30, 32 are, on the contrary, isolated from this network and operate

independently.

The user's different franking machines are under the surveillance of a data-

processing server charged with managing the set of the franking machines and

disposed at a distance from these production sites in premises A of the Postal Service or

at the machine dealer's. This server 50 is conventionally connected by a communication

means to a network (of the type ~~RTC/RNIS~~PSTN/ISDN/X25), for example via a modem

52 to the public network 40.

According to the invention, at least one supervision terminal 60 is provided,

connected to the public network by a modem 62 (which is preferably integrated in the

terminal) and ensuring for the user the ~~acquisition~~ input and display of data necessary

for the management of his set of franking machines. This terminal is advantageously

located on a production site near the traditional machines not having a link to the public

network. of course, a plurality of terminals having access to the same data may be

disposed on the same site or on different sites depending on the user's needs. The

terminal is placed in relation with the server by means of a videotex protocol (for

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example the protocol known under the name of "Teletel") or by a so-called TCP/IP

protocol through an Internet explorer 5 (browser) and in accordance with a specific

process which will now be explained with reference to Figure 2 and which shows the

different steps of placing the terminal 60 of the user's set of franking machines in

relation with the server 50 of the Postal Service (or of the dealer of these machines).

Page 5, First Paragraph:

After having made the connection with the server (connection to the 10 "Minitel"

service or to the Internet site of the server), a welcome page appears on the screen of

the terminal. In a first step 100, the user is invited to enter via the keyboard of the

terminal his identifier which may consist of a customer's name or a password or a

personal identification number (PIN). If these references are correct, the server displays

at the terminal, in a following step 110, the complete list of the printing heads

(electronic and traditional) in the user's possession (on all these sites or possibly on a

given site if the user so requests) with, for each of them, both the last index of

invoicing previously validated by the server and the current index (the preceding

~~acquisition~~input) with its corresponding date of ~~acquisition~~input. If said references are

not correct, the user is invited to renew his identification (it will be noted that, in the

event of repeated failures, the connection to the server is automatically interrupted and

a call to the After-Sales Service is then necessary in order to re-establish the service).

Step 110 may also optionally comprise a step of display at the supervision terminal of a selectable plurality of tables and/or statistics in graph form relating to this list of printing heads.

Page 7, First Paragraph:

It will have been noted that the ~~acquisition~~ inputting of the indexes is, of course, valid only for traditional machines, the indexes of the other heads not ~~been able to be modified~~ being modifiable in this manner. However, by displaying the indexes of all the printing heads, it is possible to give the user a complete picture of his set of franking machines and therefore to be able to inform him at any moment of the state thereof, the preceding and current indexes of the electronic machines being in fact sent in known manner once a day directly to the server by the permanent links existing between the franking machines and the server.

Page 7, Last Paragraph Continued to Page 8:

The structure of the franking machine for carrying out the process according to the invention is illustrated in Figure 3. In addition to the conventional devices (not shown) concerning the entry, the conveying and the positioning of the postal items with a view to printing the postal indicia, it comprises a printing head 70 for ensuring this printing under the control of a central processing unit 72 conventionally comprising means for memorizing programmes and data. A non-volatile memory 74 is further

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provided to receive the postal data and in particular the content of the reversible

meters which are preferably memorized as a function of date (and hour) data furnished

by a clockcalender 76. A user interface 78 provided with a keyboard and a display

means, for example of the liquid crystal type, is also available at the level of the

franking machine to allow the acquisition of diverse data necessary for franking (for

example the nature of the carrier or category of dispatch and possibly weight of the

article to be mailed in the absence of automatic weighing) and the display of multiple

information for the user (verification of the ~~acquisitions~~ inputs for example) and in

particular the invoicing index.

Page 8, Second and Third Paragraphs Continued to Page 9:

By this system, the user is obliged to dialogue regularly with the server in order

to avoid a blockage of his machines. In addition, as, after each connection, a calculation

of the code of authorization to frank is proceeded with, integrating in particular the

current index acquired by the user, frauds on this index are eliminated as, upon

~~acquisition of~~ inputting this code on the franking machine, any error will block the

machine. A stricter surveillance of the postal traffic is also obtained, as well as a better

security of the exchange of information.

If the set of franking machines comprises only machines linked to the network,

the ~~acquisition~~ input of the identifier including at least one password or personal

identification number will show on the display screen of the supervision terminal used a

menu allowing the user to ~~acquire~~ input new invoicing indexes relative to all these

machines, or to consult the state of all the machines of the set with the last respective

indexes validated by the server as state of the various statistical data defining this set,

able to be parametered, locally or globally, in the form of tables and graphic

representations in particular.

Page 9, Second Paragraph:

The invention thus covers a process for monitoring the consumptions of a

plurality of franking machines through a public communication network, in which a link

is firstly established with a management server, by means of at least one supervision

terminal independent of this plurality of machines, in accordance with a determined

protocol of communication, and an exchange of data is then proceeded with between

the terminal and the server during which the user ~~acquires~~ inputs at the supervision

terminal an identifier including at least one password or a personal identification

number, and receives in return the possibility of selecting in a display menu of said

terminal, the ~~acquisition~~ inputting of new indexes or the display of the last indexes

validated by the server such as statistical data relating to said plurality of franking

machines.